

AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
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**New Strategies for Keeping Schools Safe:
Evidence-based Approaches to Prevent Youth Violence**

School safety and order requires use of evidence-based programs.

- **Zero Tolerance has no scientific support and is widely criticized.** Zero-tolerance policies have expanded dramatically in many school systems to include automatic suspension or expulsion for minor disciplinary infractions (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Astor, Guerra, & Van Acker, 2010; Cornell, 2006; Skiba & Knesting, 2001). Scientific reviews find no evidence that zero tolerance prevents school violence (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Cornell & Mayer, 2010; Gladden, 2002; Mayer & Leone, 2007).
- **Suspension is linked to negative outcomes and likely contributes to the minority achievement gap.** Repeated suspension from school tends to foster a downward spiral of academic failure, disengagement from school, and antisocial behaviors, with an increased probability of dropping out (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Harvard University, Civil Rights Project, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). The widespread disproportionate suspension of minority students has been linked to minority underachievement (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010).
- **Evidence supports several new approaches to discipline.** Schools often respond to disruptive students with exclusionary and punitive approaches that have limited value. Two major approaches to school discipline and student self-regulation are School-Wide Positive Behavioral Supports (SWPBS) and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Research strongly suggests that both approaches are beneficial, but neither is sufficient. Next generation evidence-based disciplinary systems should include a blend of elements of SWPBS and SEL (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). Large-scale demonstration and implementation research is needed.
- **Evidence supports the use of threat assessment strategies.** Student threat assessment is an alternative to zero tolerance that is based on a problem-solving response to a student's threatening or concerning behavior rather than by profiles or checklists of student characteristics. Approaches such as the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines lead school authorities through a decision-tree process of investigation accompanied by efforts to resolve the conflict or problem that led the student to make a threat. Field tests and early research show that most threats can be identified and resolved without removing students from school (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010; Strong & Cornell, 2008).

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